

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 DODE-00 PRS-01 EB-07 MC-02

DHA-02 ORM-02 /079 W

----- 088087

R 211015Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1043

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 20610

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: EGEN, VS

SUBJ: IBM EMPLOYEES AND ASSETS IN VIET-NAM

REF: CALCUTTA 1721 (NOTAL)

1. EMBASSY BRIEFED BRUCE TOMSON, IBM REPRESENTATIVE BANGKOK, ON PORTION OF MISS LE THI NGOC MAI'S INTERESTING COMMENTS CONCERNING HIS FIRM'S COMPUTERS LEFT BEHIND IN SAIGON (REFTEL). ALTHOUGH HE WAS ABSENT WHEN MISS MAI PASSED THROUGH BANGKOK, TOMSON NORMALLY DEBRIEFS IBM EMPLOYEES WHO LEAVE SAIGON AND IS IN A GOOD POSITION TO JUDGE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS WHICH CONCERN IBM.

2. TOMSON WAS INTERESTED IN MISS MAI'S COMMENTS ABOUT PROBLEM OF SUPPLIES. HE SAID THAT MINOR ITEMS SUCH AS PAPER CAN BE EASILY PURCHASED OVER THE COUNTER IN MAJOR ASIAN CITIES, SOMETHING SOMEONE IN, SAY, AN SRV TRADE OFFICE IN SINGAPORE COULD DO, UNLESS AMOUNT WAS SUCH THAT IT WOULD RAISE THE EYEBROWS OF THE SELLER. IBM CONTROLS MORE CLOSELY SALE OF COMPUTER RIBBONS BUT A DETERMINED PURCHASER COULD PROBABLY SUCCEED IN OBTAINING THEM. WHAT
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VIETNAMESE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ACQUIRE EASILY ARE SPARE PARTS.

SINCE THEY PRESENTED TWO LONG SHOPPING LISTS FOR PARTS IN APPROACHES IN SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG EARLIER IN THE YEAR, IBM HAS ALERTED ALL ITS ASIAN BRANCHES TO BE ALERT TO, AND REJECT, ALL SUCH APPROACHES ON BEHALF OF THE SRV. IBM/FRANCE EMPLOYEE WHO VISITED SAIGON IN FEBRUARY FOUND THAT THE PRINCIPAL CONCERN OF VIETNAMESE WAS TO OBTAIN PARTS. AN EMPLOYEE WHO DEPARTED SAIGON IN MID-JUNE NOTED THAT VIETNAMESE HAD ALREADY BEGUN CANNIBALIZING COMPUTERS. (INTERESTINGLY, HE ALSO REPORTED FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT THE COMPUTERS HAD BEEN WIRED TO DETONATE AT TAKEOVER, WIRES WHICH NVA THEN CAREFULLY CUT.)

3. SO FAR AS IBM HAD BEEN AWARE, VIETNAMESE WERE USING COMPUTERS ESSENTIALLY FOR TRAINING PURPOSES (WITH MOST NVA TRAINEES RETURNING TO HANOI AFTERWARD) AS WELL AS CONTINUING THEIR ROUTINE FUNCTIONS IN REGARD TO SAIGON'S TELEPHONE, ELECTRICITY, AND WATER SYSTEMS. NEWS THAT VIETNAMESE ARE NOW TAKING OUT INFORMATION ALREADY CONTAINED ON COMPUTER REELS IS A RECENT DEVELOPMENT, ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN EXPECTED FOR SOME TIME. WHETHER THE AUTHORITIES HAVE YET BEEN ABLE TO SORT THROUGH THE TAPES TO LOCATE POLICE RECORDS AND THE LIKE IS UNCERTAIN.

4. IBM DOES NOT EXPECT ANY MORE OF ITS REMAINING APPROXIMATELY FIFTY EMPLOYEES TO BE ABLE TO LEAVE SAIGON, ACCORDING TO TOMSON, UNLESS IT IS BY A CHANCE FISHING BOAT. THOSE WITH ANY CLAIM TO FRENCH OR OTHER NATIONALITY HAVE ALL NOW DEPARTED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS, COMPUTERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BANGKO20610
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760280-0729
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760738/aaaabhgh.tel
Line Count: 87
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 CALCUTTA 1721
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <26 APR 2004 by buchant0>; APPROVED <19 AUG 2004 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: IBM EMPLOYEES AND ASSETS IN VIET-NAM
TAGS: EGEN, EQUIP, VS, TH, IBM
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006